

THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
AND
THE FOREST LAND ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM
Encouraging and Enabling Long-Term Private Forest Management

Non-industrial private forests (NIPF), nearly 45 percent (or 354 million acres) of all forestland in the U.S., contribute significantly to the quality and quantity of our water, air, wildlife habitat, recreational resources and timber supplies. Unfortunately, much of this private forest land is in a state of decline and vulnerable to fire, insect disease, and/or conversion, due to a lack of active management. It is estimated that less than 10 percent of NIPF owners develop a management plan prior to harvesting timber, and an increasing number of landowners are under pressure to sell or convert their forested properties to non-forest uses. As forests become fragmented, ecosystem functions can diminish and remaining forest areas are more vulnerable to emerging environmental threats.

Together, the Forest Stewardship Program and Forest Land Enhancement Program are attempting to address these challenges by providing landowners with a full complement of technical, educational and financial assistance to encourage active long-term forest management. The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) makes landowners more aware of the various values associated with their forested properties, and provides them with multi-resource forest management plans for enhancing and sustaining these values. The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) complements up-front FSP education and planning efforts by providing landowners with cost-share dollars to implement their management plans and follow-up technical assistance to encourage management plan completion and the achievement of long-term forest management objectives.

Landowner Awareness, Education and Planning

The Forest Stewardship Program was authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 and first enacted with the 1990 Farm Bill. Through state forestry agencies and other partners, the FSP has provided more than 225,000 multi-resource management plans that describe long-term management strategies for nearly 30 million acres of private forestland nationwide. The Program continues to reach out to thousands of landowners each year, who may not be aware of the many opportunities associated with their forested properties.

Management Plan Implementation and Follow-Up

The Forest Land Enhancement Program was established by the 2002 Farm Bill to remodel the cost-share components of NIPF landowner assistance programs by emphasizing long-term forest sustainability. FLEP was crafted to take the best components of the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) and Stewardship Incentives Programs (SIP) to better complement the landowner awareness and multi-resource planning efforts of FSP and to provide States with additional resources to encourage long-term active private forest management. With FLEP, states can provide cost-share and follow-up technical assistance to landowners to help them implement their multi-resource management plans and reach their long-term goals. A National survey¹ conducted by the Forest Service in 1999 indicates that landowners are almost three times more likely to implement their forest management plans if they receive some form of cost-share or follow-up technical assistance.

Both the FSP and FLEP provide state partners with resources to create and deliver technical assistance and educational programs to NIPF owners. The FSP emphasizes landowner outreach and the delivery of assistance at the planning stage, while FLEP emphasizes the delivery of assistance

¹*Evaluating the Forest Stewardship Program Through a National Survey of Participating Forest Owners*; J. Dixon Esseks and Robert J. Moulton; Center for Governmental Studies, Northern Illinois University, February 2000.

for the implementation of management plans, and educational programs that encourage long-term stewardship commitments.

Program Administration

Both the FSP and FLEP are administered by the Forest Service in partnership with state forestry agencies under the advisement of State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees. FLEP will be administered according to authorizing legislation (The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, as amended in 2002) and Departmental rulemaking. The FSP is administered according to authorizing legislation (Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978) and a set of National Standards and Guidelines.

Funding Allocation

Funds for both FLEP and the FSP are granted to states, from regional and area offices based upon national priorities set by the Chief of the Forest Service and on a number of criteria. The criteria that are used reflect forest land base conditions and nationwide demographics, including number of NIPF owners, number of NIPF acres, agricultural land in need of protection, number of acres capable of producing at least 20 cubic feet/acre/year of timber -- and past program performance in terms of forest stewardship plans and acres. Additional allocation factors consistent with 2002 Farm Bill language are being developed for use in fiscal year 2004.

Strategic Planning

To be eligible for participation in the FSP, each state must maintain and periodically update a State Forest Stewardship Plan that provides local program direction and links to regional and national strategies and priorities. To be eligible for participation in FLEP, each state must prepare and maintain a State Priority Plan that details cost-share, technical assistance and landowner education strategies. The Priority Plan also explains how FLEP complements other landowner assistance programs including the FSP in the state.

Accomplishment Reporting

Accomplishments for both FLEP and FSP are reported annually by states through the newly revised Performance Measurement and Accountability System (PMAS). Performance measures for the FSP include number of assisted landowners, number of management plans prepared for NIPF owners, and number of acres encompassed by plans. Performance measures for FLEP are focused on acres of NIPF that are successfully managed as a result of planning and cost-share assistance, and acres that are impacted by landowner education programs. In addition, the Forest Service conducts random landowner participant surveys to better assess how management plans and technical assistance activities are translating into on the ground management accomplishments.

Additional Forest Stewardship Program Authorities and National Priorities

As an expanded budget line item, the Forest Stewardship Program also includes the Rural Forestry Assistance (RFA) section of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act. The RFA program authorizes the Forest Service to provide financial and technical assistance to states for tree and seedling improvement programs and for management prescriptions on non-federal forests including thinning and prescribed burning to address immediate forest resource threats and concerns. Through the RFA, the FSP is also able to support the work of the Reforestation Nurseries and Genetic Resources (RNGR) Center and state efforts to address forest resource threats on a multi-ownership and landscape scale.